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Statement submitted by National Women's Council of Catalonia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The year 2015 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a document that was signed by 189 countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women. That United Nations conference was a watershed for women's rights given that it incorporates earlier treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Platform established 12 critical areas of concern in the fight for gender equality and highlighted the steps that were needed in order to remove the obstacles that prevent the advancement of women. While it is not a legally binding document, it serves as a policy guide for Governments, institutions and NGOs.

Almost 20 years since that conference, which, as captured by its theme, invited us to "look at the world through women's eyes", we can assess how the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been implemented in each country and see how far we still are from fully achieving the objectives set out in 1995.

Violence

On 24 April 2008, the Parliament of Catalonia adopted Act No. 5/2008 on the right of women to eradicate gender-based violence, which established not only a support system but also an ideological framework on what constitutes gender-based violence, its causes and consequences and how public authorities can tackle it. The Act makes clear the importance of using the term "*machista*" (referring to sexism towards women), the rights of women and the network of services that is needed to provide support. It establishes very clearly that in the areas of prevention, detection, support and recovery, action must take a coordinated and interdisciplinary form.

In 2010, a decree regulating the activities of the National Commission for Coordinated Action against Gender-based Violence was adopted. The role of the Commission is to serve as the lead agency for institutional coordination in order to promote, follow up and evaluate measures taken by the departments of the Generalitat in addressing gender-based violence, and to develop the involvement of those departments and their cooperation with relevant civil society entities.

The Commission has established specific and distinct working groups. The group on female genital mutilation is currently very active. The group on the prevention of abusive relationships among young people and adolescents and the group on disabled women victims of gender-based violence have recently started their work, while other groups are still to be established.

In recent years in Catalonia, Act No. 5/2008 has continued to be developed and new services have been created to set up a support and recovery network for victims of gender-based violence: one municipal women's information and support service operating in each town of more than 20,000 inhabitants and one in each *comarca* (county), in accordance with the Act; and specialized intervention services, although the latter are not distributed evenly across Catalonian territory, which is why work is being undertaken to address the difficulties women have in accessing transport and resources in order to move between towns. It should be noted that the Service for Intervention in Serious Cases of Gender-based Violence has remained active despite a low budget.

Violence is the ultimate expression of the abuse of power, which must be fought on multiple fronts. It is therefore essential that women's organizations and bodies that implement prevention and detection programmes and other activities continue to be subsidized so that the network that women can use to enhance their skills and tackle gender-based violence can be supported.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

The austerity crisis and resulting austerity policies, with their centralizing effect, have led to further social inequalities that have affected, among other areas, the health of women, particularly those in the most disadvantaged groups.

According to some statistical data and studies such as the Catalonia Health Survey 2012, the Caritas Survey 2013 and a perceptions study carried out by the National Women's Council of Catalonia in 2013, there has been an increase in psychological problems that affect mental health and lead to musculoskeletal pain and excessive medicalization. Among chronic illnesses, for example, not only has there been an increase in breast cancer, but women who suffer from that disease lack quality of life. Attention should also be drawn to problems during pregnancy, the birth of underweight and premature babies and reduced support with respect to related needs, such as those concerning breastfeeding. Furthermore, obstacles to health care include difficulty of access, waiting times and unsatisfactory care.

It is also important to highlight the loss of universal health care in Spain. Catalonia has sought to ensure coverage through regulation 15/2012 of the Catalonia Health Service, although there has been some opposition from specialized organizations that have said that the right of pregnant women to receive health-care cards is being violated despite the supposed guarantee. One of the most serious issues that has been raised is that women without a health-care card cannot access the public health system in order to terminate a pregnancy and have to seek a termination through the only available alternative service, which does not guarantee equal rights.

With regard to sexual and reproductive rights, Catalonia has always had one of the most extensive and integrated networks of services in Spain, although there has recently been a decrease in the number of professionals employed by those services, which is compounded when those staff are not replaced.

Economy and employment

The global economic crisis that began in 2008 also affected our country, which entered recession towards the end of that year. The at-risk-of-poverty rate, measured according to the Europe 2020 strategy, increased by 4.5 points in three years in Catalonia, from 22.2 per cent in 2009 to 26.7 per cent in 2011. The growth rate in Spain for the same period was 3.6 points, while in the eurozone it was 1.5 points.

One essential element of the fight against poverty and social exclusion is access to paid and decent work. In 2011, 10.5 per cent of the Catalan population lived in households in which adults between 18 to 59 years of age had worked less than 20 per cent of their work potential during the past year. In Spain, the figure for the same year was 12.2 per cent and in the European Union it was 10 per cent.

If we consider data gathered by the Statistics Institute of Catalonia (concerning, for example, poverty risk and difficulty in meeting financial

obligations by the end of each month) from the gender perspective, we can see that women are clearly disadvantaged. In addition, policies have been adopted that equate to a step backward for recently acquired rights which allowed women to integrate further into the labour market and facilitated their financial independence and personal autonomy.

In the second quarter of 2014, according to the Economically Active Population Survey conducted by the National Statistics Institute, the employment rate for women remained below that for men (57.9 per cent in contrast to 67.8 per cent). The pay gap is growing and female unemployment is increasing, especially among young people. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to create jobs for young women and women over 55, because unemployment will affect their retirement.

It is important to remember that the development of women has a bearing on that of their children, who consequently face reduced quality of life, which may have grave repercussions for their future.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the women who are most affected by poverty and most socially vulnerable include the elderly, single mothers, women who live in isolated rural areas, are of different cultural origin or have unconventional sexual preferences or identities and women with disabilities.